

Theodore A. Konger

Title: “The Rosenberg Case: Touchstone of a Changing America”

Faculty Advisor: Professor David Schuster

Paper written for: History A315: US History, 1945—Present (Fall 2009)

Ted Konger is a senior at IPFW, majoring in Secondary Education-Social Studies with a minor in mathematics. He worked as a merchandiser/buyer for SuperValu Corp. for twenty-nine years before returning to school. He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. In 2010 he received the Sharon Alt Piepenbrink Award for his paper “The Rosenberg Case: Touchstone of a Changing America.”

Abstract

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage against the United States on 29 March 1951. The married couple was sentenced to death for their crimes under Section 2 of the Espionage Act of 1917 by Judge Irving Kaufman on 5 April 1951. The Rosenbergs were executed in the electric chair at New York’s Sing Sing Prison before sunset on Friday, the 19 June 1953. The controversy surrounding this infamous case lived long after the Rosenbergs were dead. If the Rosenbergs had been given prison sentences rather than the death penalty, their names would be no more remembered than those of their co-conspirators Harry Gold, Morton Sobell and David Greenglass. However, they did not receive prison sentences, and their case remained highly controversial through five decades of American history. Moreover, the public perception of the Rosenberg case is a touchstone of the social, cultural and political changes which occurred in the United States following their conviction and subsequent execution. This paper will examine how the perception of Rosenberg case mirrored the social, cultural and political changes that took place in America in the proceeding decades following their executions.